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by
M.M. Gidvani



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SHAH ABDUL LATIF



AN INDIAN SUFI

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SHAH ABDUL LATIF

By M. M. GIDVANI

With a Foreword by

Sir THOMAS ARNOLD, C.I.E.



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FOREWORD

By SIR THOMAS W. ARNOLD, C.I.E., Litt.D.

VAST as is the extent of the literature available to us on the religions of India, whether in the form of editions and translations of original documents or as set forth in the record of generations of observers, our information still remains scanty and insufficient in regard to the religious consciousness of a large section of the Indian people, namely, those who stand midway between the loftiest heights that religion has attained in India, and, on the other hand, the primitive faiths of the aboriginal tribes worshipping an innumerable crowd of strange godlings—persons whose devotional life does not find expression either in the authoritative documents of the orthodox creeds or in the popular cults of the illiterate masses. For just as in the Christian world the student may often find a more exact presentation of the contents of the religious thought of many devout persons in the ‘Imitation of Christ’ or the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ than in the creeds of Nicaea or Trent, so in India the official documents of the Hindu or Muslim religions do not adequately reveal the religious influences that mould the life and thought of hundreds of thousands. For Hinduism, some account of such a religious atmosphere has already been provided in an earlier publication of the India Society—‘One Hundred Poems of Kabir’ (1914). The present volume is a contribution to larger knowledge of the rival faith of Islam in one of

its less familiar manifestations, in which it makes appeal to Hindus almost as much as to Musulmans. The annals of the early period of contact between Islam and Hinduism are filled with tales of pitiless massacre and bloodshed, and the history of succeeding centuries is marked with frequent outbursts of intolerance and persecution. It is a relief to turn from such blood-stained records to the instances in which fraternal relations have been established between these otherwise irreconcilable antagonists through more than a thousand years of the religious history of India. The tie that drew Hindu and Muslim together was generally mysticism, and among the many Muhammadan mystics that India has produced none has made so successful an appeal to the Hindus among whom they have lived than the Muslim saints of Western and North-West India. Their history is obscure, and indeed their Sufistic teaching did not tend to encourage in their followers much regard for strict historical narration; so their biographers have little information to give regarding them save tales of the unusual and the miraculous. One of these Sufis of Western India was Shah Abdul Latif, an account of whose life and teaching is here presented to the English reader for the first time. Born in the reign of Aurangzeb, whose zeal for Islam had shown itself in the destruction of thousands of Hindu temples, and had done much to alienate the Hindus from their Muhammadan fellow-subjects, he represents in his own teaching a tolerant attitude towards Hinduism that is in striking contrast to the behaviour of many of his co-religionists. He is thus

typical of a tolerance that expressed itself in varying forms on different occasions. Sometimes, as in Shah Abdul Latif's case (who, we are told, conformed to the creed and ritual practices of his religion), it could find expression in friendly relations with devout Hindus and yet imply no deviation from Muslim orthodoxy. Diligent search would bring to light a number of such instances. Mention may here be made of one only—the friendship between the Muslim saint, Jamali Sultan, and the Hindu saint, Dial Bhavan, whose tombs stand close together at Girot, and are revered by Hindus and Muhammadans alike. They lived together in close amity, and when the one visited the other he was always treated with profound respect. A story is told of their first meeting, which appears in similar form in other hagiologies, but may none the less be true. When Jamali Sultan first came to settle in Girot, Dial Bhavan sent him a vessel of milk filled to the brim as a delicate hint that Girot was already full enough of ascetics and that he would be well advised to settle elsewhere. Jamali Sultan understood the message clearly enough, but secured for himself a welcome by sending back the brimming vessel with a rose-petal floating on the surface of the milk. In other instances, such relations between Hindus and Muhammadans have led to a closer approximation of religious thought and the growth of syncretic sects, attempting to bring about a reconciliation between the rival creeds. Just before Shah Abdul Latif's period, such a sect was formed in Central India by Muhammad Shah Dulla, who compiled a book made up of a selection of passages

from both the Hindu and Muslim scriptures, and though he himself, as his name clearly indicates, had been born a Muhammadan, he adopted as the supreme deity the expected incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. The later religious history of India presents several other examples of such a syncretion, and signs are not wanting of a similar religious direction at the present time. Now, as two centuries ago in the writings of Shah Abdul Latif, the readiest lines of approximation are by way of Sufism and of the adaptation of Hindu stories for the inculcation of such mystical doctrine as is common to Hinduism and to Islam. The writings of Shah Abdul Latif therefore are not merely of historical interest, but they represent an earlier attempt at approximation, of which the religious life of the present day offers many parallels. No authentic portrait of this saint is known, but the frontispiece gives a typical example of a Muhammadan religious teacher of the class to which Shah Abdul Latif belonged.

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INTRODUCTION

THE SUFI SECT IN SIND

IN the north-west of the Bombay Presidency, and forming an awkward appanage thereof, is a small wild desert which was annexed by Sir Charles Napier in 1847. It is known to the modern commercial world perhaps only on account of its thriving port of Karachi. Here has lived and worked a band of inspired Sufis who sang of Love and Union, and transformed their desert home into a rose-garden filled with the plaintive notes of bulbuls* wailing in separation from their Beloved. Away from cities' 'madding crowds,' in their obscure haunts on little sandy hills, they passed their days in contemplation and in pursuit of their goal—the attainment of Union with the Infinite. They lived in obscurity and died without a nation's mourning, but their work still lives, and it 'smells sweet and blossoms in the dust.' The very air of Sind is full of the mystic fragrance of these flowers of Sufism, Inayat, Sachal, Rohal, Dalpat, Bedil, Bekas, Swami, and Shah Abdul Latif. Four centuries of Sindhis have listened to their rapturous outbursts, sung their Kafis† to the accompaniment of the Earthen Jar and the Sitar; the ploughman at his plough, the shepherd-boy leisurely grazing his sheep, the rustic on the Persian wheel goading the weary oxen to ply, the camel-man in the desert, the refined and cultured gentry, Musulmans and Hindus alike—all sing of the Sorrows of Separation, and in

* Nightingales. † Ballads.

heart-rending strains utter the question and the cry, 'Oh where, where art thou?' It is impossible to exaggerate the unifying influence which these mystic poets have exercised on the different communities of their province. Thus, divided, as the Hindus and Musulmans are, in their daily life by separate creeds, ritual, and dogma, yet they resemble the Ganges and the Jumna flowing apart and under different names, but the same in essence and merging into one another, becoming, after all, one and the same.

Sufism is the common ground on which all the desert inhabitants meet in fond embraces as members of a fraternity which knows no caste, colour, or creed, but which only asks, 'Are you thirsty, O traveller? Enter, then, and drink.' Hindus and Musulmans all may not be familiar with the Sufi doctrines, but the spirit of their teachings pervades every heart and brings home to it the essential identity of Rama and Allah. Indeed, it can with justice be remarked that Theosophy is not a new thing in Sind. Centuries before the birth of Olcott, Blavatsky, and Besant these Sufi mystics sang the song of Divine wisdom, and in their religion of Love levelled all distinctions born of ignorance. So it is not uncommon in Sind even now to find Hindu disciples bowing in reverence at a Muslim shrine or Muslims before a holy place of the Hindus. Indeed, not a month passes but it sees a fair at some sacred shrine of one of these Sufi poets, where thousands of devoted disciples flock from all parts of Sind, Hindus and Musulmans alike, keeping vigil and filling the night air with the soul-dwindling strains of the departed sages.

It is not hard, then, to conceive that of nothing else is a Sindhi so proud as of his Sufi poets. He would place them on a level with the Persian poets, Hafiz and Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, and would not hesitate to claim for their king, Shah Abdul Latif, a place by the side of the world's great poets. Not vain is their boast nor absurd their claim, for the world knows nothing of its great men, and—

‘Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.’

But the time is not far when the unknown great of India, and among them the Sufi mystics of Sind, shall rise, as it were, at the trumpet-call of the angel Israfil, and shall serve as ‘ambassadors of goodwill and understanding between East and West.’ A higher Providence rules mortal destinies than we can conceive of, and perhaps it was well that Sir Charles Napier ‘sinned’ in annexing ‘Sind.’

The present is only a humble attempt to give a brief account of the life and work of Shah Abdul Latif, for the great poet of Sind needs a high-souled musician, like his own gifted ‘Charan,’ adequately to convey his song, and when such a one comes—

‘The world shall listen then
As I do now.’

M. M. GIDVANI.

LIFE

SHAH ABDUL LATIF was born in A.D. 1689 in a small village in the district of Haidarabad (Sind), in a Sayyid family. His great-grandfather was Sayyid* Abdul Karim Shah, a saint well known in Sind. He is now popularly called 'Shah Karim,' and a large fair is still held annually in his memory.

Many wonderful stories are related of the childhood of Shah Latif. It is said that as a bare stripling of four years he was placed under a teacher to learn his alphabet. The preceptor asked him to repeat 'Alif,' the first letter. The child obeyed and said 'Alif.' The teacher then asked him to repeat 'Be' or 'B,' the second letter, but this the child flatly refused to do, and said there is no 'B.' The teacher then brought the perverse child to his father and related the whole story. The father listened with rapt attention, and being himself a wise man, understood the child's mystery.† He jumped with joy, and embracing Latif and kissing him, exclaimed, 'Child, you have understood aright.'

On another occasion, it is believed, the marvellous boy stopped from the company of his playmates and hid himself in the hollow trunk of a tree, where he remained immersed in thought for three days, after which he was traced by his father.

These stories and others, showing the peculiar habits and strange ways of young Latif, leave no doubt but

* Descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

† Stands for Allah, one without a second.

that he was indeed a precocious child. He loved solitude and would often-times be seen sitting in a corner with his face furrowed as if buried in deep thought. Often he would walk into jungles and disappear for days together.

Gradually Shah Latif's fame began to spread far and wide, and the number of his disciples grew day by day. But he still loved to wander over hills with fakirs and sit in a corner with recluses. After some time, however, he settled down and built himself a hermitage in a lonely spot among sandhills surrounded by a dark forest that was intersected by beautiful lakes. His fame as a poet and a saint was soon established, but the honour he received was not without its inconveniences. It created rivalries, and brought to the poet the enmity of various leaders, some of whom actually attempted to kill him. But Latif remained unaffected, and came out triumphant in the end by his faith in God. He died in the year A.D. 1752, and it is believed that some of his disciples followed him that very day, dying of grief.

HIS CHARACTER

SHAH LATIF was tall and well built. He had a broad forehead and a pleasing complexion. His temper was uniformly cheerful. He was simple in dress, simple in food, and in all things. He was full of kindness and love, and he showed it not only to human beings, but also to birds and animals. His gentleness and humility were unique, and he was consistently honest and upright in his dealings. He was of an independent nature, quite unlike some of the contemporary poets of Persia and India.

HIS CREED

THE CLASS of religious thinkers to which our poet belonged, viz. Sufis, is generally considered heretic and not of the true faith. It has never received countenance from the orthodox preceptors of Islam, and there are instances when its members have been persecuted to death for their beliefs. Thus, the famous Mansur-al-Hallaj was quartered for proclaiming the downright heretical doctrine, 'I am God.' Latif is a rare instance of a Sufi true to the tenets of Sufism and yet faithful to the creed and orthodox ritual of the Prophet. He used to pray five times daily, tell the beads, fast, and read the Quran. But he observed the orthodox forms and ceremonials merely to set an example to the ignorant masses, and he quite knew their limitations. While he said the prescribed prayers regularly, he still held that—

'Fasts are good and prayers may be sound,
But by something else is the Beloved found.'

His was a creed of perfect tolerance in thought and action. Freedom to think and to worship as he liked was man's highest privilege, and so he was opposed to forced conversions.

True to all things else, Latif was, however, unable to subscribe to one of the injunctions of the Quran—the prohibition against singing and dancing. He was wonderfully sensitive to the influence of music, which touched his very soul and tuned it with the Infinite. He is reported to have said once, 'In my heart there is a tree of Divine Love which dries up unless I sing or listen to music. I am restless without it, but with it I commune

with the Creator.' He lived in an atmosphere which vibrated with waves of harmony, and departed listening to melodious strains of the song of Divine Love. Indeed, so intense was his love of music, that generations of disciples have sung their lives away at his shrine, and the woods and sandhills, his favourite haunts, still resound with the echoes of Sasni wailing in the wilderness for her Punhu, Suhni crossing the stream and crying in the whirlpool for Mehar's hand, or Momul groaning in the flames for a last loving look from Rano. Even now every Friday evening a huge concourse of devoted fakirs gathers on Bhit, the shrine of Shah Latif, and sings in heart-rending strains his songs of separation and union.

SOME ANECDOTES

I

A BLIND MAN once went to Latif for blessing to regain his lost vision. At that moment the poet was in a state of mental absorption and wholly oblivious of the external world. After a short while the blind man received light in his eyes, and began rejoicing over his good fortune. Latif, now gaining consciousness, inquired the reason of so much joy, whereupon the man said, 'Sire, I came here blind and asked for your blessing. Now I have attained light by your favour.' Latif, disclaiming all knowledge of the matter, said that gratitude and thanksgiving were due to God, who had heard his prayer. Then he repeated the following couplet:

'The same God, sometimes He cancels the path,
sometimes He is a guide on the path. He degrades
and He exalts.'

II

One day in the presence of Latif and his assembly a fakir related that a certain man's wife ran away with her paramour. Latif, in feigned wonder, exclaimed, 'Really?' The answer being in the affirmative, he said, 'Credit be to her; that is exactly what she ought to have done.' Saying this, he was lost in contemplation for some time, after which the disciples reverently inquired the reason of so much thought. The poet replied, 'Consider this, my friends. A weak woman plucked so much

courage as to elope with her lover. We males have not the courage to run away with our lover, namely God.'

III

On another occasion Latif had retired to the trunk of a tree and was telling beads and repeating God's name when two milkmaids came up to rest under the shade of a tree. They began to inquire after each other's condition. One said to the other, 'Sister, I have met my lover so many times this month; how many times have you met yours?' To this the other replied, 'Sister, why inquire as to the number of times? Why should we keep an account with our lovers?' Latif, who was listening attentively to this dialogue, was much impressed by the second maiden's answer, and at once throwing aside his rosary, said, 'Indeed, why keep an account with our Lover [God]?'

IV

Once a fakir was milking his cow. He had tied the little calf at some distance, and the poor thing was struggling hard to reach its mother. Latif thereupon requested the fakir to allow the poor calf to go and suck the milk which was its birthright; but, as the fakir was reluctant, he unfastened the calf himself. The little animal jumped eagerly forward to its mother and soon emptied her teats. The poet, seeing this, remarked that the seeker also ought to pursue his object with similar zeal and single-mindedness.

V

On another occasion the poet was sitting by the roadside when some travellers bound on the holy pilgrimage to Mecca happened to pass by. Learning from them the object of their journey, he also joined the caravan. Soon after, they halted near a stream of fresh water, which was being approached by a herd of thirsty goats. They came, drank water to their fill, and turned their backs to the stream, regarding it no more. The poet observed all this, and uttered the following extempore verse:

‘I search far and wide and do not find.

May I never meet my Friend!

The burning desire of longing in the heart is
cooled by meeting.’

With these words he returned home, and it is said that he never went out on travels again.

THE RISALO

THE poetical works of Shah Latif have been collected together and printed in book form in what is known as his *Risalo* or 'Works.' The first edition of this book was printed in Leipsic in 1866 through the efforts of Dr. Trumpp, while another was printed in Bombay the following year. These have since been amended and improved through the zeal of the Government Educational Department.

This is not the place to describe the skill of the poet's technique or the subtleties of his metrical composition. In the subject-matter of his poetry Latif has but a single theme—Divine Love. He knows only Alif (A); for him there is no Be (B). But his supreme merit does not lie in the theme he has chosen; that is but common to every Sufi poet. Hafiz, Jami, Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, and Attar all deal with Divine Love and Union, each in his own way. Latif's genius is revealed in the method adopted for communicating his teachings in the garb in which he has presented them to the reader. His supreme merit lies in an emotional appeal to all, learned and unlearned, through human stories; preaching Divine Love through human love. He has struck for himself an altogether original path. He has made use of different local tales, current ballads, and popular love stories sung by wandering bards and minstrels, and woven out of them all a wonderful fabric of mystic song. By such means he has achieved what other mystics fail to do—winning the interest of the average man and

woman. There is scarcely any branch of life which he has not touched, with the one common object of illustrating his Religion of Love. Sometimes he is a patient waiting for a physician to heal him; sometimes a pearl-diver who brings his pearls as humble offerings and waits for their acceptance; then a simple village maiden who has spun a thread on her spinning-wheel and is diffident of the quality of her thread; at another time a sailor's wife who mourns for her lover out on distant seas; and then Sasni wailing in the desert for her Punhu; Suhni crying in the stream for Mehar's hand; Momul longing for Rano's kiss in the fire; Marim pining for her original home; Hir love-lorn for her Ranjhu—always the seeker yearning for Union with the Beloved. Apart from the tales which he has absorbed into his poetry, the poet's knowledge of the technical terms of different trades and professions is indeed wonderful. What is said of Shakespeare can in a measure be justly affirmed of Shah Latif: that he seemed to have entered and specialized in all professions. None but an experienced seaman could use his vocabulary of the sea, and that too with such a mastery of description. None but a trader, a blacksmith, a weaver, could use the familiar imagery and expressions of his respective craft. Their influence may well be imagined. In a hundred different ways, in a hundred different garbs, he presents the same lesson, viz. seeking the Truth; not the trumperies of the world, its false and brittle glassware, but real pearls; not pleasures which are meant to allure the devotee from the path, but the goal; not Dum, the false lover, but Mehar, the chosen Love of the Heart. This

is conveyed in a manner that charms because it is so pleasant, by repetition that does not tire because it is not monotonous, through a medium which he uses with confidence and mastery while enriching it by his touch, with such a wealth of simile and metaphor that the reader finds himself spellbound.

‘Like a three years’ child he must stand and listen.’

TALES ON WHICH THE POEMS ARE BASED

I

SUHNI AND MEHAR

OF the popular tales of Sind, that of Suhni and Mehar is perhaps the most romantic. When the Moghul Emperor, Shah Jahan, ruled over Delhi there was a wealthy potter named Tala, in Gujaral (a village in the Punjab), who had a beautiful daughter named Mahi. About that time a handsome youth named Izzat Beg, son of a merchant of Bukhara, had started on his Indian tour, and visited Lahore and Delhi, buying and selling merchandise. He chanced to pass through the village of Gujaral and fell madly in love with the potter's daughter. So he stayed away indefinitely and forgot his home and profession.

'A wizard old his cup extends,
Which whoso tastes forgets his former friends,
Sire, ancestors, himself.'

He used to visit the potter's house constantly on the pretext of buying the pots, and so oblivious was he of his state that in a short time he converted all his wealth into pottery. His home was now full of pots—small pots, big pots, pots of all sizes and shapes. Very soon he was obliged to open a shop and turn pot-seller to maintain himself. But his heart being with Suhni, how

could he attend to retailing earthenware, he who dealt in the commodity of Love? So the shop was closed and Izzat Beg, son of the wealthy merchant of Bukhara, became a menial in the service of Tala, whose daughter he loved. First they put him to knead the clay—

‘In that old potter’s shop . . . alone
With the clay-population round the rows.’

Then they gave him a herd of buffaloes to graze, and he did graze the buffaloes as a labour of love. At last one evening chance brought him face to face with his beloved, to whom he then confessed the secret of his heart. Suhni* was struck with this rare devotion, and she gave her heart to her father’s servant. Then followed a course of clandestine meetings, but not for long. The girl’s parents suspected the attachment and summarily dismissed the grazier of buffaloes who dared to love their daughter, and the daughter herself they speedily married to a neighbour’s son. Unfortunately there was no obliging Friar Lawrence to aid this Indian Juliet, who, unhappy bride, spurned her hateful husband’s advances and forsook all food and drink. She lived in perpetual mourning, so that even her husband soon grew tired of her. Meanwhile Suhni contrived to communicate with her lover through a friend.

Unhappy Izzat Beg wandered about for some time, whereafter he went and established himself in a cottage on the other side of the river Chenab. Even when oceans divide, love can stem the tide, and so every

* Literally it means ‘The Beautiful One.’

night the Bukhara youth would swim across the river and meet his beloved. After a time, however, he received a wound in the side and so could not move out of bed, and Suhni used to steal from her house at night, swim across the river on an earthen jar, and meet her sick lover. 'This continued for some time, but as 'the course of true love never did run smooth,' even this was not to be. Suhni's sister-in-law discovered these secret meetings, and also observed that Suhni, after returning from her lover, always hid her jar under a heap of grass. So one night she treacherously removed that jar and substituted in its place another one of unbaked clay. The next night Suhni came as usual, took her jar, and entered the stream. Soon after, as the kutchā* jar could not stand water, it broke, and poor Suhni was cast upon the waves. Bitter was her wailing and loud her cries and calls to her Mehar to come to her rescue, but all in vain. A short while after, as Suhni was grappling with the waves, Mehar learnt of her danger and went to her aid, but the poor potter-girl was already buried in her watery grave. Thereupon Mehar too in his grief jumped into the river, and the two were thus united in death.

II

SASNI AND PUNHU

THE tale of the loves of Sasni and Punhu is the most popular of all tales in Sind. The pangs of separation of Sasni, her sufferings in search of Punhu,

* Unbaked.

her bare-footed wanderings in mountains in the burning sun, her sorrowful appeals to the beasts of the desert to sympathize with her suffering and to show her kindness and trace her lost Punhu, finally her romantic death and ultimate union with her lover—all these are the common property of Sindhis of all creeds, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. The camel-men, carrying merchandise through sandy wastes, beguile their tedious hours of night by singing at the top of their voices the sorrows of Sasni. One camel-man finishes his song, and the next moment another one from the rear takes up the refrain. Thus do they cheer their path by singing melancholy strains and cheat the hours of their tedium. Lovers in their bowers, bargemen, shepherds, ploughboys, camel-men, hermits, students—all sing in the same strain the grief of separation—the ‘Song of Sasni.’ Indeed, so often have their loves been sung during these centuries that the very air of Sind is full of echoes of ‘Sasni’ and ‘Punhu.’ There is the sandy desert of Sind, the moonlit night, the passing caravan, and the camel-men singing the song of Sasni, and ‘Wilderness were paradise enow.’ It would make pure poetry, and indeed dull must he be of soul who does not feel himself elevated and tuned with the Infinite and made one with Nature. The scenes and the sounds would touch a secret chord, and, striking grief that is Divine, could whisper to the soul messages from her own abode that is forgotten.

Sasni was the daughter of a Sind Brahman (Hindu priest) named Naoon. At her birth the astrologers prophesied that she was destined to wed a Musulman.

At this the unhappy parents, rather than suffer this disgrace that was in store for them, and to avert the blow of destiny, placed the baby in a box and threw it in a river. This box was picked up by a Muslim washerman named Muhammad, who, having no child of his own, brought up the girl as his own daughter. Time passed and Sasni grew into a beautiful young woman. Now about this time there was a famine in the neighbouring country of Kacch. Makran, the chief of this hilly tract, prepared a caravan, and placing his son Punhu at its head sent it to Sind for grain. The caravan arrived at Bhambhor, the native place of Muhammad the washerman and Sasni his adopted daughter. There it was that Sasni and Punhu saw each other and fell madly in love at first sight. The result was that when the caravan of Kacch was returning, Punhu, their leader, declined to join them. He stayed away at Bhambhor and would not part from Sasni.

Great was the grief of the Balochi Sirdar when he learnt of Punhu's plight. He sent his other sons with attendants to travel to Sind and bring Punhu back to his home. When these arrived at Bhambhor, Sasni, considering them as her brothers-in-law, gave them a cordial welcome and hospitality befitting their position. The guests stayed for some days, after which one night they placed Punhu on a camel and stole away, leaving Sasni behind. Morning revealed the truth to the girl who was thus forsaken: no Punhu, no brothers, no camels, no camel-men!—all were gone, and poor Sasni was deserted. She beat her breast and tore her hair and threw dust on her face. She ran like a stricken deer; she

pursued the camel-track, but the caravan was nowhere to be seen. The traitors had crossed the borders of Sind. But without Punhu there was no turning back, so she wandered in every direction, crying to the hills and dales, trees and streams, birds and beasts, 'Punhu, Punhu, where is my lost Punhu?' Then she met a goat-herd who, fascinated by her youth and beauty, attempted to assail her virtue; but she fled and cried for help, when mother earth opened her bosom and received her chaste daughter in a fond embrace. The goat-herd, seeing this miracle, was struck with awe, and collected a heap of stones and piled them together to mark her grave. Some days passed, when Punhu, disconsolate in grief, contrived to escape from his parents and flee to Bhambhor. As chance would have it he passed by Sasni's grave, and thinking it to be the shrine of a saint, he bowed down before it and begged for blessings. A voice came from the grave and a call to Punhu, and then two arms were extended and received Punhu inside. Thus the earth, kinder than man, united the ill-starred pair in death. The prophecy of the astrologers had come true.

III

MOMUL AND RANO

A HINDU RAJA of Sind, named Nanda, once went a-hunting, when he saw a wild pig and pursued it. The beast jumped into a river, but the rider and horse followed it. Strange to say, wherever the pig went the water changed into dry land, so that the pursued and the

pursuer reached the other side in safety. The Raja, seeing this marvel, determined more than ever to kill the beast, and at last succeeded in his object. Cutting the carcase into pieces he verified its magic influence by throwing portions of it into water. The perishable parts he threw away but kept the teeth. With the help of these he took all his treasures to the river and buried them in its bosom, thus insuring them against all risks of fire or theft. The secret of the whole affair he kept to himself. One day, while he was out, an anchorite came and begged for alms at the palace gates. Momul, one of the nine princesses, heard the prayer and asked the beggar what he wanted. The beggar, feigning serious illness, said: 'Princess, great is my pain and danger. Had I but a pig's tooth my life would be saved.' Momul, remembering that there was a tooth in her father's room, went and brought it, and ignorant of its properties and the consequences of her action, gave it away to the false beggar, who, thanking her profusely, went his way. When King Nanda returned and learnt of this, he flew into a rage, and was about to kill Momul, when his other daughter, the wise Mosul, interceded on her behalf and promised to restore the lost treasures to her father. Thereafter she, accompanied by Momul, and a maidservant named Natar, went out of the city, learnt sorcery, and built in a wilderness a wonderful magic mansion around which she guided a stream of sea-water. This last she named Kak. Further, she contrived a wonderful maze, placed ferocious beasts, born of her sorcery, at its corners, and then proclaimed that the first man to cross the maze and reach the palace

would win Momul for his bride. Soon after, the fame of the beautiful princess in the wonder-mansion of the wilderness spread far and wide, and brought many a fair youth to try his fortune and secure the beauty for a bride. They all came for a bride, but lost their wealth and their lives into the bargain. Thus, by her sorcery, Momul filled up the hollows in her father's treasury and very soon paid back all that was lost by her folly.

At last there came one Rano, the wisest vizier of Umarkot, who by his extraordinary cleverness contrived to find his way to Momul's chamber and also to her heart. This was followed by clandestine meetings. Rano travelled every night on a swift she-camel and returned home before daybreak. It was not long, however, before the attachment was discovered, and Momul's father compelled Somul, his cleverer daughter, to terminate it speedily. Somul yielded to her father's pressure, and soon spread her nets. She disguised herself in male attire and slept by the side of her sister after poisoning the mind of Rano by a false report against her. When Rano came at night he obtained proof with his own eyes of Momul's faithlessness, and retired in a rage after leaving his stick behind. Momul, failing to reconcile Rano, at last journeyed to his palace disguised as a male ascetic. She soon won her way into Rano's favour, disguised as a hermit skilful in throwing dice. One day, however, she was discovered. She begged for reconciliation, but finding Rano immovable, she went and lighted a fire and threw herself into the flames. When Rano heard of it he hastened to the spot, entreated Momul to come out, saying: 'Wrong

was I, and blinded by my jealousy. Forgive and come out, O Momul.' 'Love, I die happy now,' was her only answer, and then the Suttee perished. Presently Rano, in grief and remorse, also leapt in, and thus death united those whom life had parted.

IV

HIR AND RANJHU

SOUTH-WEST of Lahore, in the Punjab, was a village named Jhang Siyal, ruled over by a chief called Chuchak. He had a daughter Hir, famed for beauty and virtue.

In the neighbourhood of Jhang Siyal was another village, the chief of which was Manjhu, who had eight sons. The youngest was Ranjhu, very handsome, and like Joseph, son of Jacob, well beloved of his father. When Ranjhu was only fourteen years of age his father died, and his brothers, who were always jealous of him, turned him away with only a small pittance. Ranjhu did not lose heart nor did he harbour any ill-feeling against his brothers, but quietly he left his native village and proceeded to Jhang Siyal. After wandering alone for some days he reached the bank of the river Chenab, fatigued and worn out. It was sunset; the devout worshippers with folded hands and closed eyelids were bowing in reverence before Zinda-Pir, the water-God, the bargemen were trimming their oil lamps, and the village temples had filled the air with sounds of gongs, bells, and conch-shells; it was an hour of rest and peace, and this Ranjhu needed more than anything else. He

looked anxiously for a boat to ferry him across to the other bank, when a beautiful barge approached and greeted his expectant eyes. Decks of silver and lamps of gold, sails of silk and cabins decked with canopies of satin! It was a fairy barge manned by a crew all clothed in white. Ranjhu approached the boatmen reverently, and humbly making his obeisance, persuaded them to let him rest in the boat for a while. But he was soon dragged out of bed; for, hearing of the boatmen's impertinence, Hir had arrived and ordered the immediate expulsion of the bold stranger. Presently her anger vanished, for, at the very sight of Ranjhu, Hir fell madly in love with him and became oblivious of all else. She called Ranjhu to herself, fully apologized for her rudeness, offered her hospitality to him, and finally avowed her love for him. He, in his turn, confessed how he was smitten by her beauty. Yet another case of love at first sight, and subsequent clandestine meetings, which, however, were soon discovered. The result was expulsion for Ranjhu and a forced marriage for Hir with one Khero, of Rangpur. Like Suhni, Hir would have nothing to do with her husband. She gave up food and drink, and was always in mourning. Ranjhu, on the other hand, wandered about in the garb of an ascetic, longing for a sight of Hir. Good luck brought him to Rangpur, where he managed to meet Hir, and flee with her, through the good offices of her sister-in-law, Sahti. They were, however, pursued, brought back and tried before the local Kazi (magistrate), whose verdict was immediate exile for Ranjhu and the compulsory return of Hir to her husband's house. The very day Ranjhu

left, the village caught fire, and this misfortune was readily attributed by the simple villagers to Ranjhu's curse. Forthwith messengers were sent to conciliate him, and, when he arrived, Hir was handed over to him by the chief himself. The lovers rejoiced at their good fortune and proceeded to Jhang Siyal, where they were received with feigned courtesy and welcome. Hir's parents asked Ranjhu to go home and return with a wedding procession, as was customary. Meanwhile, in his absence, Hir was informed that Ranjhu was murdered. She fell down senseless, and her bigoted brother, Sultan, gave her a poisoned draught to drink. Poor Hir died, but with Ranjhu's name on her lips. When Ranjhu arrived he was informed that a rival, Death, had claimed Hir as his bride. At this Ranjhu was struck as by an arrow, and went raving like a madman to Hir's tomb and fell down dead upon it.

NOTE.—All the tales are interpreted allegorically and have a spiritual significance. The heroines, viz. Sasni, Suhni, Hir and Momul, all standing for the seeker, the Beloved sought after being in each case God.

SELECTIONS FROM SHAH ABDUL LATIF'S POEMS

SUHNI CROSSING THE STREAM

THE river is turbulent, so the sea; but far different are the eddies of Love. On the river-bank the lovers sit silent in a corner, agitation-free.

The river-bed is full; the buffaloes dance away in fear; the countenance of Mehar is the ornament of my body. I shall cross the waters. The stream for me is but a stride, for my Loved One waits on the opposite bank.

Comrades, the lashing waves are still ahead; idly you sit at home and form new connections. Sisters, you keep me from my Dear One and call me foolish. If but once you see the face of my Love, you will not hold me. With your jars you will all enter the stream, if but once you see the face of my Love.

If my comrades see what I have seen, they will sacrifice home, hearth, and husband. They will enter the stream, reckless of life, if but once they see the face of my Love.

The village-women flock to the river-bank. Each carries her jar, and, entering the shallows, boasts of sacrifice, saying, 'Behold, I am Suhni in search of my Love.' Morning will find them all at the bottom of the stream.

Hundreds stand on the bank and cry, 'Love, my Love.' Some care for life; others plunge headlong, crying, 'In Love's name.' They will win the Lord who enter renouncing their life.

I see the buffalo-sheds on the opposite banks. I remember the pledge. The time draws nigh. Shrink not, O pitcher, from the battle of the waves. Take me to the other side lest my buffalo-grazier taunt me, 'Why so late?'

I steal through the dusk and listen for my Love's voice in the voices of the buffalo-graziers on the opposite bank. I stand watching, with longing in my heart.

Plunge into the waters, sacrifice in Love's name lest it be late, too late, and my buffalo-grazier chide me, 'Why so late?'

I enter the stream, my only support an earthen jar. Thou, O Lord, carry those in safety who have their love-tryst on the other bank.

The light has grown grey in the sky, the rooks have flown back to their nests. Hearing the muezzin's twilight call to prayer, Suhni jumps into the waves and seeks the bank where her buffalo-grazier waits.

The jar broke, the girl died, the means were lost. Thereafter did Suhni hear her Mehar's call.

THERE IS NO PILOT LIKE LOVE

THERE is no pilot like Love. Carry not the Self with you; forget all the means. Love will ferry you across the muddy stream. Those will quickly cross the stream who have Love as their pilot.

There is no pilot like Love in the heart. Standing on this bank of the river, the false ones ask for rafts. The river is but a rivulet for those who swim without a raft. O Suhni, from of old, yearning carries the lovers across. No whirlpools check those who seek the Friend.

They who love the Friend, the Friend loves the same. The raft is a burden to those who have intense love in their heart.

Love is the bark for those who long for the Friend. The water becomes land for those who long for the Friend.

The Lover is the same, the Beloved is the same, and so is the stream. All the three are One. This is the profoundest secret of all.

Sincerest Friend of all, strongest of all supports, ferry me across to the other bank. The dark whirlpools of the ocean I consider as land. I have cast off all hope of life from my heart. Ferry me across to the other bank.

The sea is stormy, and loud is the roaring of the waves where furious sea-monsters abound. Limitless are the stretching waters and fathomless their depths to the mariners whom ugly sharks and hungry whales surround. Mighty ships and whole argosies vanish in the depths; not a piece, not a plank of them remains.

What is the witchery in that dark whirlpool whence no traveller returns?

There, there, my Lord, help the unwary to cross the stream.

SORROWS OF SASNI

1. Draw near, O Friend

DRAW near, O Friend; do not go in front. Wailing in sandy deserts, the tired one raises her arms. Return to me, Dear One; the cries of pain will kill me.

Draw near, O Supreme; go not far, O Husband. Life of my life, return, lest I die in the mountains. Do not, O Punhu, forsake this foot-traveller on the way. Draw near, O Friend; do not wound the afflicted. Enter my house and inquire, lest I die, my Love. Forget me not, my Husband, O Ari,* my God. Remembering you, I wail in longing.

Do not forget me, my Husband; I cannot court patience. I watch for you; come my Love. Draw near, O Friend.

2. The Heart has no rest

The heart has no rest without the Friend. Love of Punhu has taught me the taste of longing. The heart now has no rest without the Friend. O God, bring those that taught me the taste of longing. The heart has no rest without Punhu. Those are dear to me that taught me the taste of longing.

THE MOUNTAIN†

HARD are you, O mountain; hard one, you give me hardships. You cut my body as the woodman cuts the tree. It is the urge of Destiny, else who would tread over stones?

O mountain, my first complaint to my Friend shall be, 'The stone broke my feet into atoms.' You tore the soles of my feet. You had no mercy in your soul and no regard for my worth.

* The tribal name of Punhu, the lover of Sasni.

† Throughout the book 'the mountain' is symbolical of the lower self, which serves as an obstacle on the path of the devotee.

Do not injure me, O mountain; I am already afflicted. I remember no happiness, I remember many woes. Meet it is to comfort the bereaved, meet it is to console those whom the Friend has deserted. How can you, O stone, injure the feet of such ? Afflicted and aggrieved, I disclosed my secret to you, and, narrating the grief of the Beloved, I died.

Weep with me, singing the dirges of Punhu. An only friend I had, and he deserted me. Whom shall I blame ? I am the victim of Fate.

The afflicted ones come to communicate their sorrows to you. Meet it is to offer consolation to the sorrow-stricken ones. The tears are not dried on the cheeks of the bereaved.

Even the stones of Pab* are broken into atoms. The pangs of pain cut my heart in twain. Afflicted though I am, I shall sacrifice myself for you, who are the Eternal Abode of my Friend.

Even the beasts fell dead hearing the dirges that the destitute one sang on the mountain. What will you do to the afflicted by burning ? If you have the stones of Pab, my limbs are made of steel.

From the heights where the mountain meets the sky I watched the footprints of my Love. Thus I remained on the path, beating my breast in vain.

I sit expectant by the wayside. Without my Friend I shall not move from here. Latif says, 'With the mercy of the Merciful, I shall meet my Beloved.'

Wailing, I relate my Fate to my mother. I abandon

* Name of a mountain.

all bonds and ties with the trees of my native land. Those will roam the mountains that have fire burning in their bosoms.

Friend, do not forsake me at this stage among the mountains. For Allah's sake bring this girl nearer to the caravan.

They left me among the mountains. I was detained by my self.* Those that are misguided by vanity, O Friend, reach your hand to such on their way.

MY PLIGHT

IF only they saw my helpless plight, O sisters ! I cannot climb the peaks, nor reach my goal. Mountains they cast into the lot of this afflicted one. With trees Sasni made vows and pacts. 'If I return bringing my Punhu with me, unto every branch I shall give a gift.' They plucked my heart as the root of a wild tree. They bled my heart and turned it red as a pomegranate blossom. Stones from the mountains, these they sent as ornaments to me.

Men on the wayside see me and call me foolish. May He have pity for whom I roam the mountains. I shall weep and dye my garments in blood. Sisters, I am wounded with the longing for my Love.

Stretching the arrow from the bow, He struck me with this longing. With this unworthy one, says Latif, the Creator will be merciful.

* The lower self.

REMEMBRANCE

TO-DAY also the eyes have remembered their Friend. Endless are the tear-drops on the cheeks. The longing for the Friend is not satisfied by seeing even the whole world. Some are distant even though near; others are near even though far; some we never remember, others we never forget.

The Friend is ever twined around my heart, and is my only aid. Without a support, without a guide, and entirely unacquainted with the ways, I shed tears of blood for my Husband. Joyously I shed tears in the Hab* for my Friend. I shall reconcile Punhu, my Love, with humility. I shall grind and bake, if you take me with yourself.

Helpless am I without a guide and unacquainted with the ways. There are thieves lurking in the caves and snakes roaming in the desert. Return, O Punhu, lest I die, my Love.

THE MASTER HEALER

MY condition is known to the Beloved, my grief is ancient. I am afflicted with disease for Thee, O Physician. Give me the happiness of health, and remove sorrow, O Dear One. I am wailing my Fate, I who am false and perverse. Thou art the Specialist for this. Mayst Thou come, O marvel. Thou art the cure of the heart; all others I have searched in vain. O God, take Abdul Latif to Thy bosom.

*The name of a river in Sind.

HOPE

MY loved Friend shall return safely to me that am blind. Taking me to His bosom, He will rest me there. Keeping my cheek on His cheek, He will give me the message of Love. He will take the washer-woman with Him and not leave this orphan alone.

REALIZATION—THE LORD IS WITHIN YOU

THEY have their home on the river-bank, but still they are thirsty, the ignorant ones. The Lord is near their life-breath, but they cannot find Him. They know not, and they complain like aggrieved ones.

Leaving Punhu behind, you search him in the mountains. You trouble yourself about Him who is wedded to you. Return and ask those behind the way of Punhu. Seek the loved ones in your heart your whole life.

He is not there where you thought Him to be, O simple ones. Count up and sacrifice all the corners of the houses ; do not go and seek far, for He is within.

Leaving other doors aside, ask yourself about Him. He whom you seek is with you. Look within; within yourself is His abode.

Thou art the Beloved Prince of my heart, I the slave of Thy slaves. With folded hands I stand for ever in Thy Presence. I shall not leave Thy door even a moment. Do not, O Lord, remove Thy grace from me.

ON HUMILITY

BEND low in humility and look; anger is woe. Blessed will you be, if you stand firm on this habit. Bend low in humility and look ; anger is a great woe.

All happiness lies in patience, if only you understand. If they rebuke you, fling it not back from your mouth. Verily he is punished who seeks precedence. The man of pride, nought in his lap did he carry. They might answer; do not fling the abuse back. Melt your mind into wax towards all, says Latif. Adopt patience, for no good comes of pride. Though you listen to abuse with your ears, do not return it.

Of the guide's instructions this one is the weightiest: 'They pulled best who killed the passions with patience.' Do not fling back abuse at those that cast it on you. Give daily a previous advice to anger. Never return abuse, then shall you be blessed. Do not revile the non-revilers, and forget the abuse of the revilers. All day long, with reverence, this course you must adopt. With your head betwixt your knees, live in poverty. Entertain the Judgment-deliverer, that you be not dependent on a Kazi.

THE MOTH

ASK of the moths news of burning. Fondly they come and jump into the Flame, wounded by spears of Love. Call you yourself a moth? Come, then, and extinguish the Flame. Burning has burnt many; you burn burning itself. Know and cool, disclose not to the world.

Call you yourself a moth? Then fly not from the flame. Jump and be blessed.

The moths made a resolve and gathered round the Flame. They did not shrink back from fire, but burnt themselves on Truth.

THE REAL SUFI

THE Sufi washed clear the Leaf of Existence. Thereafter he saw the Lord while living. If you keep the Sufi crown on your head, be a true Sufi. Take the poisoned bowl and quaff it brimful. This is the realm of those who realized the Truth.

A REAL YOGI

IF a real Yogi you would be, break all the ties of the world. Attach yourself to those that never were born nor will ever be born. Then will you reach the end of Love's journey.

If a real Yogi you would be, then be not like those that are. The Form has lost you (ruined you). You have lost your Form (essence). Blessed is he who has lost his Self.

If a real Yogi you would be, sit in silence and attain Unity. Tell the beads in your heart; do not besmear your body with ashes, if a real Yogi you would be.

Renouncing all greed, save those that are slaves of slaves, the humblest, lowliest, and the lost. Cut malice and revenge with the sword of Patience. Control your mind, and burn the fire of Love in your heart. Suffer

what comes, obedient to His will. Loving your Self, be away from yourself, if a real Yogi you would be.

ONE WORD

READ only the word of Alif. Forget all the learning of books. Purify your heart. How many books will you read? See whence the word has come. The forty fasts—they equal not a sight of the Beloved. If twenty leaves you turn, the same one word remains.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

HE Himself is the Beloved. He Himself is Perfect Beauty. He Himself is Master and Disciple. He Himself is His Own Thought. He sees Himself. He creates Diversity. And the Seeker of the many too is He.

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Call Him not Lover, nor a Beloved either. Call Him not Creator, nor created either. From Unity there was Diversity. From Diversity, Unity. The Divine Truth is One. Err not with another speech.

GOD IS ONE

SAY God is One; learn not another word. Write that True Word in the tablet of your heart. Call Him not a Lover nor a Beloved either. Call Him not Creator nor the created either. Among beasts and birds and peacocks do not err with another word. All the noise and confusion of people is for Allah.

This and that are the same, and so are Death and Allah. The Friend is the same, the Breath is the same, and the same is the Enemy and the Helper.

The same is here, the same is there, and the same pervades in the beast. The same sees Himself by His Own Light. If the secret of Sound you know, the Echo and the Call are the same. They both were one ; in hearing alone they became two.

One palace, lakhs of doors, and millions of windows—wherever I look I behold the Lord face to face.

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